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The Origins and Formation of England Netball

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Netball is arguably one of England's most successful female team sports, being a core component of the National Curriculum, one of the largest participation sports according to the Active People's Survey, and recognised on the international stage through the Commonwealth Games and World Cup competitions, with the England national team currently ranked third in the world standings. In 2016, the highly successful Vitality Netball Super League renewed its broadcasting relationship with Sky Sports, becoming a showpiece for the newly formed Sky Sport Mix channel, and Loughborough Lightning provided the first opportunities for women to compete as full-time professionals in Britain. However, despite these developments, and the integration of the sport within British society, netball has had limited recognition in both the public and academic sphere, significantly, within the sport history discipline. Histories of netball have been conducted on the leading nations, including Australia and New Zealand where netball is celebrated and recognised as a principle national sport. However, even as one of the first established netballing nations and integral to the sport's foundations, England still lacks recognition. Founded in 1926, the All England Net Ball Association (AENA) provided governance for the sport, which was popularised in the physical education colleges of England and America. This paper aims to detail the early history of netball through examination of its National Governing Body (NGB), considering the individuals involved and their impact on the development of the sport's national and international profile throughout the twentieth century.

Keywords: Women's Sport; Netball; England Netball

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1. Current Climate

- Current success – England 3rd in the world rankings, biggest female participation sport in the UK, diverse – encourages all age/race/class, paid professionals (Loughborough), Sky TV deal for Super League and international matches. Recent BBC coverage of test match vs Australia (400,000 watched)
- Netball is a female team sport, 7 a side game where goals are scored by throwing a ball through a hoop. Players have zones/areas that they can/can't enter and there are specific roles/positions that each player has to fulfil. E.g. only two shooters who can enter the shooting D. Ball passed between players via hands. Match 60 mins in 15-min quarters (**play video!**)
- Netball has been given some bad press due to the increased funding that it has received – nearly £17m from Sport England – people struggle to understand why this money has been given to the sport! Not in the Olympics, not recognised as a priority sport,
- Negative attitudes in the press have surrounding the fact many people's experiences of the sport go back to their childhood – being forced to participate during school, the unflattering netball skirts, the restrictions on movement, etc. - not necessarily reflective of netball today and unless you are part of that world perhaps you are unaware.
- However, in order to understand how netball has got to this point we need to look to the past and consider how netball has developed...

2. Netball narrative

- Current narrative is very limited! General story is that it formed from basketball and had a largely English influence before being diffused out to the Commonwealth countries. Stronger narratives on Australia, New Zealand, etc. but there is still history missing (or hidden!).
- We need to challenge this so we do not fall into the traps of regurgitating myths and fallacies!
- Issue here is the history of netball is much more multifaceted than saying there was only one influence and one route through! **Timeline**
- We can mark key moments but what is the correct pathway?
- More detailed story:
 - Significance of physical education in the origins
 - Naismith was a physical educator and developed a sport for indoor participation that was less demanding than American football!
 - YCMA spread the rules of the games throughout the US and Canada, and Britain
 - However, game was not seen as appropriate for women – far too sweaty and strenuous for the women's body!
 - Rules for a modified version of the sport started to be considered and “women's basketball” emerged.
 - Senda Berenson (women's physical educator in the US) credited with the origins of women's basketball but there was also Clara Gregory Baer's version of “women's basketball” that provided even more restriction on movement
 - Clara Gregory Baer developed the game of “Basquette”, used within the PE dept of Sophie Newcombe College, Louisiana
 - Six a side game, zones for the players to restrict movement and prevent exhaustion. Players were not able to dribble, guard or snatch the ball. Passes could be made between the players with three attackers, three defenders on each side of the court
 - Netball was played on the continent but was much more aligned to basketball – this is one of the issues as the terms seem to be used interchangeably!!
(video)
 - American stage netball, “founded” by Jerry Hart and wife, Beatrice Leo – 5v5 games that could be easily transported around the country. Game similar to football except the foot cannot be used! Fouls caused by kicking/propelling the ball in any other manner than with the upper body, above waist area. Umpire's whistle signifies any rough play **(picture)**

- Football grounds used to demonstrate netball (played by men with larger baskets) and Rugby netball emerges at a similar time **(picture)**
 - New Zealand established the first Netball Association in 1924: 9v9 netball
- During this period texts discuss netball and talk about its suitability as a girl's game
- 1909 – discussion of hockey not being an appropriate sport for women – Physical Education teachers opinions – Mrs Woodward, head of British College of PE, says NO! Advocates other games such as cricket, lacrosse and netball
- Netball amongst the favourite pastimes of girls by 1914 and other organisations, such as the girl guides, are triumphing netball for those aged 12 and over.
- 1933 curriculum names netball as a winter sport for all girls
- 1935 rebrand to incorporate further “hand” games means that the AENA now looks after basketball, field handball, hazena, touch rugby, bounce handball (re-branded again in the post war era) – shows distinction; development of NGBs for these activities? Perhaps netball's identity wasn't as clear as described?
- I will present that one version of this story is more likely than others – but I suspect that this was heavily influenced by others and modified over the years

3. Osterberg, PT College and Netball

- MBO, was one of the most formidable physical training instructors within the nineteenth century – trained in Stockholm as a mature student (aged 30), and indoctrinated into the Swedish gymnastics system – posture, form, physiology; scientific training
- Osterberg is credited as one of the founders of netball, although there are further layers to this (as mentioned previously)! The combination of American influence, communication with other educators, and MBO's vision encouraged this new sport to blossom with the students at her PT college
- The college originally was started in Hampstead in 1885, moved to a specialist facility in Dartford from 1895, was one of the most prominent and well-respected women's training college within England
- Her facility was the only full-time physical teaching college for women at the time outside of the Royal Institute, Stockholm
- Her pupils went on to develop further women's physical training colleges and influence the development of many sports, directly or indirectly! **(pictures)**
- They followed the principles of MBO; system of Swedish gymnastics, games, dance, physique and health training.
 - Anstey – felt Dartford was elitist and MBO was snooty; wanted to have a more open college where all would feel welcome (working-class involvement). Women's suffrage campaigner
 - Stansfeld – taught at Dartford before establishing Bedford – seen as a troublemaker and disloyal to her "master" when she left to form this new school!
 - Wilke – not trained by MBO but her programme was heavily influenced by her due to Dorette's appointment of several ex-Dartford women, including EA Roberts before she went on to establish Dunfermline and Carnegie
 - EA Impey/Roberts – also previously appointed at Anstey College. Writer of *The Handbook of Free-Standing Gymnastics* – Ling standard for gymnastics/PE training. Founder and editor of *Journal of Scientific Physical Training (1908-1929)*. Founder of the Birmingham & District Trained Gymnasts Club. On the first committee for netball rules in 1900, written at the time by the Ling Association
- Ling Association itself is interesting – formed by ex-Dartford women as an exclusive association for Dartford and Royal Central Gymnastics Institute, Stockholm, alumni **(Click)**
 - Swedish system preservation

- However, MBO was not happy with her students and wrote to them to state that she wanted no involvement with the organisation; removing herself as president elect of the organisation.
- Nonetheless, they continued and the women who became members of this organisation were influential in developing PE for women within UK
 - From 1904 they were able to set examinations and award their own diplomas
 - Inspected and endorsed colleges
- Ling had control over the formative years of netball – since 1900 rules were prepared and issued by them, but this changed with the establishment of a separate NGB
- What we know about the NGB
 - Formed in 1926
 - Inaugural meeting at the YWCA
 - Combination of Ling/London and Home Counties Netball Federation (1924) membership
 - Problems: earliest records of the organisation are 1929 so can only trace membership from this date
 - Important to consider as this may help identify the origins and development/direction of the sport

4. AEWNBA & Founding Members – Key Individuals

Edith R. Clarke

- Physical Training Instructress (Brighton)
- Lecturer in Gymnastics/Games Coach (Dartford PT and Uni of London)
- School's Inspector (HMI)
- Graduate of Dartford PT College
- Graduate of Uni of London
- Hockey & Lacrosse international (captain of England Lacrosse since 1913)
- Tennis player at Wimbledon
- Author of articles on Hockey and Lacrosse coaching

Doris M. Wilkie

- Senior Gymnastics Mistress (South)
- Lecturer in Physical Education (Bedford PT College)
- Graduate of Bedford PT College
- Secretary of Ling Association from 1929
- Author of several "Net Ball" texts 1930s – tactically driven
- ARP 1939 and ambulance driver

Muriel O. Newbold

- Gymnastics Mistress (Queen Anne's School)
- Lecturer in Physical Training (Chelsea PT College)
- Private Coaching from 1927
- Graduate of Anstey PT College
- Lacrosse international
- Author of Lacrosse material – American/positional awareness/schools and club information (with Kathleen Lockley) c.1920s-30s
- Post-humorous life honorary membership to the US Women's Lacrosse Association (1981)

Cicely "Birdie" Read

- VP and Principle of Bedford from 1909-death (1949)

- Incredible lonely and frustrated women but very clever and had outstanding achievements
- Choreographing of mass events, such as Wembley's 1937 display in form on the King and Queen
- Author of texts for Vaulting for women and girls c. 1930s
- Author of text on Lacrosse umpiring in 1966
- Close with Spafford, who in turn, was close with Colson; all instrumental in the Bedford College
 - Read first head after Stansfeld's retirement. DM Wilkie helped, Spafford took over as principle in the interim before appointment of Eileen Alexander

Link to colleges to help identify in netball was heavily influenced by Dartford

5. Conclusions

- Basic assumptions drawn on the basis of the research thus far
 - a. Definitely Osterberg/Dartford version of the games
 - b. Women involved lacked class restrictions as experienced in other sports
 - c. Philanthropic activities; about encouraging health and wellbeing through sport
 - d. Sport open to all
 - e. Success because of these women who were advocates for sport and women's health – many make this their life's work!
 - f. Suffrage? Feminists?

- International competition and knowledge transfer provided in a more serious capacity in the post-War era
 - From 1950s tours of South Africa, competition between home nations and Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, West Indies and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)
 - Annual matches held at Empire Pool, Wembley attracted large crowds (England vs Rest of the World)
 - Main issue was the fact each country played their own version of the rules but AEW NBA were keen to share and encourage competition, providing matches with half rules England, half rules opposition. These matches were played, had strong media attention, and then the committee would provide a lecture/dissemination event to the opposition
 - 1956 Australian tour provided the catalyst for further international development; started discussion of an International Federation – AENA given prominent position, having the opportunity to pick the first committee due to their significance in the sport's development
 - Rule adopted domestically by Australia (basketball) and New Zealand (9v9), changing their game

- What to do next?
 - g. Source archives of some of these women
 - h. Collective bio of these women